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# (Re)thinking Time: Giordano Bruno and Michel de Montaigne

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## *Abstract*

The article seeks to illustrate how the theme of time may be a worthwhile starting point towards uncovering useful connections between the philosophy of Giordano Bruno and that of Michel de Montaigne. Firstly, a brief literature review will assess the admittedly small but promising criticism that has previously attempted to bring the two writers together. Subsequently, the article argues that time is a meaningful way to approach their texts. Specifically, time refers to the drama that arises between the material body, which generally exists within a so-called natural order of time, and the mind which is not tied to the present moment, and is free to contemplate both past and future time. The article argues that Bruno and Montaigne's understanding of time in this manner leads them to question traditional representations of time, such as the common fear of death, in remarkably similar ways. This process will be illustrated through examples drawn from two chapters of the *Essais* and a dialogue from the *Eroici furori*, and will conclude by assessing the straightforward connections that have arisen between the two authors, as well as scope for further research in this area.

*Keywords:* Giordano Bruno, Michel de Montaigne, Sixteenth Century, Time

## 1. *Introduction*

In recent years, a small number of critics have attempted to establish significant biographical and intellectual connections between Giordano Bruno and Michel de Montaigne. Both writers do indeed appear to be obvious candidates for comparison with one another. Bruno, born in Nola (near Naples) in 1548, spent around two years (1579-1581) studying in Toulouse, the birthplace of Montaigne's mother and a city the Frenchman was well acquainted with.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Between September 1579 and the summer of 1581, Bruno lived in Toulouse, a city well-known to Montaigne' (Bayod 2004a, 11-12). Any English translations are my own except the translations of Montaigne's *Essais* and Bruno's *De gli eroici furori*, which are by

The two men were also both resident in Paris in 1582, where Bruno was staying at the same time Montaigne, then mayor of Bordeaux, arrived at court regarding diplomatic matters related to his office (Frame 1994, 248). Much has also been made of the link with John Florio, an Italian-English scholar and good friend of Bruno, who incidentally produced the first translation of Montaigne's *Essais* into English in 1603.<sup>2</sup> Florio has been identified as a potentially significant link between the two writers, due to his admiration for Bruno's thoughts on translation, and his subsequent discussion of this in the preface to his translation of Montaigne (Pellegrini 1943, 193). Considering all of these possible points of connection, it seems likely that at least one major study would already have been published with the aim of establishing further crossover in their works.<sup>3</sup> However, no such large-scale study exists to date. One possible explanation for this hesitation may be the relative complexity that arises from attempting to compare two thinkers with such a unique approach to genre, together with the impressive range of their literary output. Bruno's so-called 'Italian Dialogues' (1584-1585), a series of six texts written in rapid succession in London, are a good example of the thematic and stylistic scope that Bruno experimented with; here he attempts a philosophical project that encompasses detailed discussion of cosmology, natural philosophy, ethics and more.<sup>4</sup> These works are unlike most other sixteenth-century texts, since they are rooted in Bruno's most radical theory on the infinite universe. Furthermore, Bruno experiments with the traditional philosophical dialogue, often including elements of satire and comedy in his work. The *Essais* are altogether different in genre. This series of so-called *essais* or 'attempts' comprises three books which cover a wealth of topics from

M.A. Screech and P.E. Memmo respectively (Montaigne 1991 and Bruno 1964 in *Works Cited*).

<sup>2</sup> Further discussion on the Florio connection may be found in Yates 1934, 89. Some critics have even discussed a link between Montaigne, Bruno and Shakespeare (who may have read at least some parts of Florio's translation of the *Essais*), although this connection is tenuous: 'Beyersdorff concludes that he [Shakespeare] is more likely to have been influenced by other literary works such as Montaigne's *Essays* (1580, Florio's English translation, 1603) or Lyly's *Anatomy of Wit* than by a philosopher like Bruno. He points out that it is doubtful if Shakespeare ever met Bruno, and that anyway they moved in different and at times rival circles, Bruno being linked to Sidney as a patron and Shakespeare to Southampton' (Gatti 1989, 173).

<sup>3</sup> 'And, during his stay in London, between the spring of 1583 and October 1585, he lived in the residence of the French ambassador Michel de Castelnau, who was known as a *politique*, with views not too dissimilar to Montaigne regarding the political and religious conflicts in France at that time ...' (Bayod 2004a, 12).

<sup>4</sup> In the word of N. Ordine, 'It is here that Bruno begins to outline a complete trajectory from the philosophy of nature (*Cena*, *De la causa* and *Infinito*), passing through moral philosophy (*Spaccio* and *Cabala*), and arriving at contemplative philosophy (*Furori*)'. 2002, 13.

child-rearing to suicide. In each chapter, Montaigne attempts to pin down the flow of his thoughts as they enter his mind and express them through writing.<sup>5</sup> The word *essai* alone was unheard of in the French language of the sixteenth century; *l'essai* represented a completely new literary genre altogether (Magnien & Magnien-Simonin 2007, xiv). Clearly Bruno and Montaigne engaged with philosophy in very different ways, perhaps helping to explain why no major works have appeared that directly compare the two thinkers.

Despite these difficulties, the concept of time may well be able to highlight similarities within their philosophical projects. At the heart of these projects is arguably a desire to challenge preconceived knowledge about the world. During the sixteenth century, Western Europe was experiencing radical upheaval. Columbus' discovery of America dramatically questioned what European society thought it knew about the world. A whole new continent of people had been encountered, with cultures very different from those of its European invaders. Montaigne was fascinated with *les barbares*, and some of his most well-known chapters, 'Des Cannibales' (I, xxx) and 'Des Coches' (III, vi) deal with the 'otherness' of these tribal people and their exotic rituals. In fact, Montaigne doubted whether these supposed *sauvages* were really that different from Europeans at all.<sup>6</sup> Bruno was also attracted to the unfamiliar nature of this new world. Yet in the *Cena de le ceneri* (1584) he considers it a place not of savagery, but of innocence. In a striking critique of Columbus' treatment of the Native Americans, he sarcastically compares the explorer and his troops to the glorious myth of the Argonauts. Except that 'they have found a way to disturb peace elsewhere, to violate the native people of those regions'.<sup>7</sup> The New World is 'other', but it is an otherness which has been desecrated by the savagery of Europeans. Both thinkers began to question the assumed authority of European society, and whether the supposedly 'different' nature of this new civilisation was good, bad, or really that different at all.

Moreover, new ways of counting time were being introduced in the sixteenth century. The Gregorian calendar appeared in 1582, just as Montaigne was writing the *Essais*, and only a couple of years before Bruno began work on his 'Italian Dialogues'. Although it has now been in use for centuries, at the time of its inception the Gregorian calendar was another huge change to sixteenth-century society. Moreover, it was not a very welcome change. The

<sup>5</sup> In the words of Magnien and Magnien-Simonin: 'It is a matter of containing shapeless thoughts, in order to conserve and then observe them; fleeting in their uncontrolled movements, in short they are the flux of the interior monologue that Montaigne will label fantasies, imaginings or thoughts' (2007, xii).

<sup>6</sup> Montaigne's 'De la Coustume' (I, XXIII) is a good example of his ability to reflect so-called difference back onto his readership; he blames custom for blinding people to the strangeness of their own societal rituals.

<sup>7</sup> '[Loro] han ritrovato il modo di perturbar la pace altrui, violar i patrii genii de le reggioni' (Bruno 2002, I, 452).

new calendar was widely disliked, since it represented an upheaval of centuries-old custom concerning the counting of time.<sup>8</sup> In 'De mesnager sa volonte' (III, X), Montaigne confesses his trouble adjusting to the new calendar: 'The recent suppression of ten days by the Pope has brought me so low that I really cannot wear it' (1991, 1143).<sup>9</sup> As with the New World, the Gregorian calendar arguably symbolised another change to traditional perspectives on the world. In light of such developments, I believe that Montaigne and Bruno responded by using their writing to further destabilise customary ways of viewing the world. In particular, this article seeks to make some preliminary connections between Montaigne and Bruno through their active engagement with time, examining their portrayal of the difference between body-in-time and mind in (and out of) time. Embracing the spirit of change that was engulfing the sixteenth century, both men exhibit a freedom to rethink traditional conceptions of time, even inventing new ones, in response to the perceived dilemma between the body, which overwhelmingly occupies a finite existence within time, and the mind which conceives infinite possibilities outside of this existence.

This article examines evidence from two chapters of the *Essais*, 'Que le goust des biens et des maux depend en bonne partie de l'opinion que nous en avons' (I, XL) and 'Coustume de l'Isle de Cea' (II, iii).<sup>10</sup> Despite appearing in different books, the Villey-Saulnier edition notes that both chapters were probably written around 1572 (Villey 1965, 350). The chapters from this period are heavily concerned with death and time; indeed, both the 'Isle de Cea' and 'Que le goust des biens et des maux' contain a particular focus on *la mort volontaire*. These excerpts will be compared to the first dialogue from the second part of the *Eroici furori* (1585) by Bruno. This was the final text written by the author in Italian, and is described by Nuccio Ordine in a corresponding foreword as the conclusion to this particular series of Bruno's works.<sup>11</sup> It is primarily a reaction to the superficial language of the Petrarchists,

<sup>8</sup> Leofranc Holford-Strevens provides a general introduction to the significance of this reform in *The History of Time: A very Short Introduction* (2005). For a more detailed account of the transformation of Western computation of time, see Part II ('Our Time: The Imposition of Order') in Anthony Aveni's study *Empires of Time – Calendars, Clocks and Cultures* (1989). The most significant change involved removing ten days from the Julian calendar.

<sup>9</sup> 'L'eclipsment nouveau des dix jours du Pape m'ont prins si bas que je ne m'en puis bonnement accousturer' (Montaigne 2007, 1010).

<sup>10</sup> 'That the taste of good and evil things depends in large part on the opinion we have of them'. For the ease of the reader, these texts will subsequently be referred to as the 'Isle de Cea' and 'Que le goust des biens et des maux'. All primary source references use the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition of the *Essais* (Montaigne 2007) and the *Opere italiane* published by UTET (Bruno 2002).

<sup>11</sup> 'He forges the texts with particular skill. First he lays down the basis of his infinite cosmology. And, after having freed the universe from geocentrism, he attempts to liberate

an attempt to transform 'a feeble language, emptied of every connection with the world' (Ordine 2002, 123) into something that can express the infinite universe with energy and meaning. Bruno uses a structure whereby each dialogue sees two interlocutors, in this case Cesarino and Maricondo, analysing a series of sonnets that describe various stages of 'heroic love' and attempting to uncover their true meaning hidden beneath the language. Already, it appears that the initial subject matter and form of each author is entirely different from the other. However, a deeper understanding of the tension between body and mind in (and out of) time emerges in these texts, spurning fascinating attempts to exploit this tension and create new ways of considering time. It should be briefly noted that this article mainly addresses questions of 'what' and 'how' in relation to these representations of time, and leaves partly unanswered the question of 'why'. Unfortunately the article format leaves little room to address this question adequately; instead I have briefly highlighted the contextual elements above in order to prompt further discussion as to the motivation behind Montaigne and Bruno's representation of time.

## 2. Bruno and Montaigne: A Growing Area of Study?

In general, it appears that Montaigne critics have remained indifferent to Bruno. Instead, several scholars working primarily on Bruno have taken the initiative, the most significant step forward beginning with Fulvio Papi's *Antropologia e civiltà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (1968). Many of the common themes discussed by later critics take Papi's text as their primary influence. Chapter seven, 'La civiltà come dignità dell'uomo' ('Civilisation as human dignity') is of particular interest. Here Papi identifies a veiled reference to Montaigne in Bruno's satirical work *Spaccio della bestia trionfante* (1584); Montaigne is the 'personaggio pazzo' or 'crazy person' being referred to when Jupiter is addressing *Otium*, complaining that some do not realise 'there is a huge difference between not being depraved and being virtuous' (Papi 1968, 346).<sup>12</sup> Papi considers this a direct attack on Montaigne's essay 'Des Cannibales', and its favourable portrayal of New World tribes and their supposedly 'virtuous' lifestyle. Papi compares quotations by both writers which describe in identical fashion their perception of New World civilisation compared to European society; both thinkers are struck by the moral

... matter, ethics, aesthetics and knowledge ... Bruno is writing the *Cena* and he already has in mind, broadly speaking, the *Eroici Furori*' (Ordine 2002, 41).

<sup>12</sup> In Bruno's words 'Differenza molta tra il non esser vizioso e l'esser virtuoso'. See Ordine 2002, 90-120. Brian Vickers provides a useful survey of the classical influences of the *Otium* vs. *Negotium* debate: 'Throughout this tradition human worth was evaluated in terms of the degree, and success of one's involvement in society, for the public good' (1990, 2).

decadence of their own society and how far it has been distanced from nature compared to the 'savages'; both thinkers use this other world to question their own society and what it really knows about, in this case, living in accordance with nature. Papi then identifies a key pattern which will later be confirmed by other scholars working on Montaigne and Bruno – namely their tendency to reach entirely different conclusions, having identified exactly the same problem at hand.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Papi says that for the first time in the history of Western thought two different positions are established here; one argues that, whilst nature should be a primary point of influence, society must act towards transforming itself 'as harmonisation and temperance of natural requirements' (131); the other believes that New World society is already a beacon of virtue with its simple, tribal existence, whilst Europe has corrupted itself beyond recognition with bloody civil wars.<sup>14</sup> Papi provides clear evidence that Bruno and Montaigne identified the same problem inherent within sixteenth-century society, but also shows that they propose very different solutions. Therefore he is one of the first critics to acknowledge the difficulties that arise between interpreting the two thinkers, whilst simultaneously highlighting the potential value of a comparison between the two.

More recently, Nicola Panichi's monograph *I vincoli del disinganno: per una nuova interpretazione di Montaigne* (2004; *The bonds of disillusion: Towards a new interpretation of Montaigne*) attempts a more wide-ranging comparison between the two writers. Clearly, the title suggests a focus on Montaigne, and Panichi's interpretation seeks once more to connect the plurality of themes and opinions contained within his works, a burden faced by nearly all Montaigne scholars. Panichi's tenuous point of entry into the *Essais* is one of 'ties', 'connections' – the *vincoli* mentioned in the title (which incidentally derive from Bruno's 1588 treatise on magic *De vinculis in genere*). In chapter three 'Le età della storia' ('The ages of history'), Panichi identifies history as one of the main connections in the *Essais* – 'the real intertext throughout the whole work'. He claims that Montaigne defines historical time in terms of repeating cycles, and subsequently compares this cyclical concept of history with Bruno's *vicissitudine* – a fundamental notion of time which is examined in this article. Panichi then claims that the term 'vicissitude' appears in later editions of the *Essais* and can be seen in the margins of posthumous editions (81). Furthermore, whilst it may be unwise to definitively label history in the

<sup>13</sup> Michele Ciliberto echoes this sentiment stating that, although they often move from a common issue, '[they] present two radically different solutions' (1999, 193).

<sup>14</sup> Papi discusses Montaigne's relativism, and the notion of the 'good native' which arose from early modern thinkers comparing their own society, steeped in bloody wars and persecution, to a simpler life. 'The disease of European society is about to give birth to the myth of the good native who is naturally moral and, because of this, immediately happy' (1968, 350).

*Essais* as circular, nevertheless this leads Panichi to renew Papi's New World discussion through a temporal lens, acknowledging the repercussions for early modern conceptions of time, as well as space:

The discovery of the New World not only demonstrates the space of a new humanism, but also the time of a new humanism: the originality of this time can throw into question the conviction that the world is about to end and can, in fact must, rejuvenate. As Blumenberg well understood, the New World is the horizon of possibility for humankind – Bruno thought so too, nevertheless he criticised some aspects of *otium* that wouldn't become *negotium* in the *Spaccio* – and, at the same time, a missed opportunity for the possibility of the rejuvenation of the whole world. (2004, 88-89)

Here Panichi has highlighted just one of several ways that established conceptions of time were undergoing scrutiny in the Renaissance. The discovery of America questions the Christian theory of the Second Coming; a timeline signalling the imminent end of the world has been radically displaced by an encounter with a previously unknown society, which is less developed and thus occupies a different 'time' in history. Although the links between the two authors are less convincing than those established in Papi's study, Panichi highlights how important contextual elements influenced Bruno and Montaigne's awareness of time and prompted them to question and query traditional conceptions of time.

Perhaps the most promising recent works that have sought to compare Montaigne and Bruno are a series of brief articles by Jordi Bayod, and a study by Eric MacPhail (Bayod 2004a, 2004b; MacPhail 2014). Bayod aims to find a direct textual link between the two authors in light of the contextual evidence that unites them. He discusses the cosmological implications of Copernicus found in a passage of Montaigne's well-known skeptical exercise the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* (2007, II, XII). He also revisits Papi's discussion, supporting it with textual evidence from other Bruno works. MacPhail begins from a slightly different premise, stating that in order to understand these 'two complex figures' he has chosen to work from a basis of anthropocentrifugalism, 'the radical alternative to anthropocentrism' (2014, 532).<sup>15</sup> After addressing Papi's criticism, MacPhail states that the debate which arises between the worth of *Otium* and *Negotium*, as the classical gods sit in counsel trying to reform the heavens, is really a debate on the meaning of history. He also explores certain issues discussed here by commenting on the

<sup>15</sup> 'To enlarge on this recent trend and to reorient the prevailing view of Bruno's reaction to Montaigne, I want to propose a new basis of comparison between two figures who were, in terms of their publishing career, exact contemporaries. This basis I will call anthropocentrifugalism ... Both authors concur in their tendency to subordinate and ultimately to negate the importance of humanity and human history in the scope of the cosmos' (MacPhail 2014, 531).



human consciousness of time compared to animals, and how this affects the way in which humans use time compared to other creatures. Despite differing approaches, both critics identify common ground between Montaigne and Bruno that has previously gone unstudied – namely the importance of their views on human beings and nature. MacPhail believes that both thinkers ‘subordinate and ultimately ... negate the importance of humanity and human history in the scope of the cosmos’ (2014, 532). Bayod agrees that, despite their differences of opinion regarding objective truth and scepticism, ‘it seems the two come together through the idea of the homogeneity of nature and particularly with respect to all forms of life’ (2004b, 266).

Evidence concerning the importance of time already begins to appear in criticism on the reception of the New World – arguably both thinkers conceive Native Americans as occupying not only a different space but also a different time to themselves (Panichi suggests America represented a new temporal paradigm: 2004, xx). MacPhail furthers this work by examining temporal aspects of the relationship between humans and animals. Subsequently this article approaches time again, but here it emerges through a specific understanding of the difference between objective, countable time and the ability of the mind to think outside of the present moment. Of course, the notion of objective time vs internal time has many philosophical influences. Aristotle sparked this discussion when he attempted to equate time with number, concluding that time is countable in motion in respect of before and after (Sorabji 1983, 84). But even he was left unsatisfied with this definition, asking whether time would exist without the soul, since who would be there to count it? Centuries later, Augustine continues this debate in his *Confessions*, arguing that time is an extension of the soul, emphasising the internalisation of time through his famous remark: ‘What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know’ (2008, 231). In recent years, phenomenology and the study of time consciousness has expressed this divide more completely. In particular, Marcel Conche’s article ‘Temps, temporalité, temporalisation’ has served as a template for this article, since it draws upon a combination of these philosophical influences in order to provide a perceptive definition of time. According to Conche, *temps-en-soi* (time in and of itself) represents what is perceived to be the natural order of time observed in plants, animals and humans; it is ‘independent from us, the foundation of all our experiences’ (2009, 11). Time in its most basic form is the power which turns future into past, responsible for the inevitable decay of the human body and its gradual, unstoppable decline towards death. *Temporalité*, on the other hand, is the reserve of the mind. Despite the body’s one-track existence within time, Conche emphasises that time resides within man too, ‘because I can think time’ (16). Furthermore, the human ability to ‘think’ time – for example through memory or philosophy – diminishes the passive role of the body’s existence in time and forces one to act, to engage with it: ‘there are no mere

spectators of life' (17). Montaigne and Bruno perfectly exemplify this call to action and, in doing so, generate fascinating new perspectives on time.

### 3. *The Body in Time*

'The body knows only differences of degree: otherwise it is of one uniform disposition' (Montaigne 1991, 60). This observation by Montaigne appears towards the middle of 'Que le goust des biens et des maux', a chapter that, just like the 'Isle de Cea', deals in large part with the graphic destruction of the body. The Villey-Saulnier edition notes that Montaigne was certainly aware of how shocking these chapters would appear to his readers. Although both are relatively short in length, they are filled with countless examples that portray the stabbing, poisoning, mutilation, and burning of the body. These instances of death appear alongside the main thread of each argument and Montaigne does not warn the reader about them. To what end does the author of the *Essais* include these examples? For Montaigne, the body 'in time' as it were, has one trajectory to complete: it is born, it lives for a certain amount of time, it dies. An existence which moves continually towards death is the sole *train*, the sole *pli* or line that the body is naturally bound to. At the start of the 'Isle de Cea' he reinforces the idea that there is a natural order of time in which the body exists, and that for most people the human condition is dictated in large part by this fact: 'Nature has ordained only one entrance to life but a hundred thousand exits' (1991, 393). Nature has given human beings one entry into the world. Since the body cannot be brought back to life, death is a certainty, and it is destined to occur in any number of external ways. Later on, this article will explore how, in the very same chapter, Montaigne manages to pull apart even this basic fact of life; for now, however, it is important to note that for the vast majority, human existence hinges on this natural course of being in time.

Various descriptions of the body's destruction only serve to further illustrate this fact, a dramatic reminder of the basic trajectory of this objective time, which appears to act externally, *upon* the body. In the 'Isle de Cea' Montaigne presents the reader with images of decay and disease: 'When Servius the grammarian suffered from gout, the best thing he could do, he decided, was to rub in poison and kill off his legs' (1991, 394).<sup>16</sup> 'Speusippus the philosopher, long afflicted with dropsy ...' (394)<sup>17</sup> is scorned by Diogenes for continuing to live in such an afflicted state. There are also several violent accounts of individuals killed in battle, no doubt partly a consequence of the bloody civil wars Montaigne had witnessed for years in his home country. One

<sup>16</sup> 'Servius le Grammairien, ayant la goutte' is forced to 's'appliquer du poison à tuer ses jambes' (2007, 369).

<sup>17</sup> 'Le Philosophe Speusippus affligé de longue hydropisie' (370).

unfortunate soldier is butchered to pieces, whilst ‘Que le goust des biens et des maux’ also features several accounts of knives and other weapons devastating the body in the heat of battle. This abundance of examples featuring bodies dying from decay, disease, violence, accident – these are the *mille yssues* that are ‘offered’ out of this life. Furthermore it appears that this natural order of time, the simple trajectory that the body makes from birth to death, is largely independent of individual control. Montaigne confirms this in the ‘Isle de Cea’ by echoing the opinion of the Stoics. Despite the degree of choice that suicide brings with regard to death, most people believe it is better to live in accordance with Nature, *selon Nature* i.e. ‘But it also means that the fool can remain alive even when he is wretched ...’ (394).<sup>18</sup> Suicide disrupts the natural order, it presents the individual with the opportunity to die before time and occasion: ‘Avant le temps et l’occasion’ (2007, 373), before the right time, the right occasion. However, it seems that, in most cases, whether one is killed by disease, or a violent blow to the head with a sword, there will always be a point in time when the body finally crumbles, and when this happens the natural trajectory of time, from birth to death, is completed. The fact remains that if the body were merely an empty vessel, and humans did not have the intelligence to conceive of memory, history and so on, bodies would continue to be born, exist, and eventually die. This is the essence of what Conche has termed ‘temps en soi’, or time in and of itself.<sup>19</sup> It is the most obvious way that time becomes apparent to human beings, since one is forced to accept one’s finite existence within it.

For Bruno the body is primarily viewed as a material entity, and it exists within an order of time that, like Montaigne, he describes as the natural order of things. Montaigne illustrates this idea of time through graphic corporeal imagery, ascribing a simple entry into and eventual departure from life. Bruno identifies a more circular, vicissitudinal order of time which affects all material things, including the body. As previously stated, critics such as Panichi have already discussed *vicissitudine* at length, since it appears across several of Bruno’s works. It essentially describes a continual ebb and flow between states, and is often referenced by Bruno when referring to the passage of time on Earth. He sees the order of the whole universe as

<sup>18</sup> ‘maintenir sa vie, encore qu’il soit miserable’ (369–370).

<sup>19</sup> In ‘Isle de Cea’, Montaigne briefly mentions how Christianity inadvertently reinforces this linear trajectory, by stating that only God can choose when human beings die: ‘Car plusieurs tiennent, que nous ne pouvons abandonner cette garnison du monde, sans le commandement exprès de celui, qui nous y a mis; et que c’est à Dieu ... de nous donner congé, quand il lui plaira’ (2007, 370) (‘For many hold that we may not leave our guard-duty in this world without the express commandment of Him who has posted us here; that it is for God ... to grant us leave-of-absence when he wishes’ [1991, 394]). However, in this chapter, the Christian point of view is not explored in any particular detail and is apparently provided for the reader as one school of thought amongst many.

vicissitudinal – light will always succeed shadows, death will always follow life and then vice versa. One of the most detailed instances of vicissitude appears in the fifth and final dialogue of the *Cena de le ceneri*, Bruno's first work in the series of 'Italian Dialogues'.<sup>20</sup> Here Bruno explains that *materia* is incorruptible and thus it only changes state, rather than being destroyed entirely:

the matter and substance of all things is incorruptible, owing to the fact that all parts are subject to all forms, so that according to all the parts (as far as is possible) there is everything; if not in one and the same time and instant of eternity, at least in different times, in various instants of eternity, successively and due to vicissitude: because even though matter is capable of being all forms, each part of matter cannot be everything altogether.<sup>21</sup>

This means that 'la morte e la dissoluzione' of bodies is actually impossible; instead, 'from time to time, within a certain order, [bodies] come to reinvent themselves, altering, changing, mutating all of their parts'.<sup>22</sup> Matter is incorruptible, and subject to all forms. However, as Bruno states here, it cannot be everything at the same time. Thus time is merely a constant changing from state to state, which Bruno observes daily in nature itself:

and everyday experience demonstrates this: in the womb of the Earth, some things arrive and other things are sent away. For humans too, we come and go, we pass through and then return: and no thing of ours does not eventually become alien, and no alien thing does not eventually become ours.<sup>23</sup>

The evidence we have seen from the *Essais* suggests that Montaigne defines the body in time through a finite trajectory, from birth to death, emphasising the potential violence or pain that may cause someone to die. However, Bruno accepts his finite existence with relative ease, since vicissitude signifies that death

<sup>20</sup> Critics such as Nuccio Ordine argue that *Il candelaio* (1582), a play written in the vernacular in Paris, should be considered the first text within this series. See Ordine 2002, 41.

<sup>21</sup> 'per che essendo la materia e sustanza delle cose incorrottibile, e dovendo quella secondo tutte le parti esser soggetto di tutte forme, a fin che secondo tutte le parti (per quanto è capace) si fia tutto, sia tutto, se non in un medesimo tempo et instante d'eternità, al meno in diversi tempi, in varii instanti d'eternità, successiva e vicissitudinalmente: per che quantunque tutta la materia sia capace di tutte le forme insieme, non pero de tutte quelle insieme può essere capace ogni parte della materia' (Bruno 2002, I, 555-556).

<sup>22</sup> 'a tempi a tempi, con certo ordine, viene a rinovarsi alterando, cangiando, mutando le sue parti tutte' (Bruno 2002, 556).

<sup>23</sup> 'e questo l'esperienza d'ogni giorno nel dimostra: che nel grembo e viscere della terra, altre cose s'accoglieno et altre cose da quelle ne si mandan fuori. E noi medesmi e le cose nostre andiamo e vegnamo passiamo e ritorniamo: e non è cosa nostra che non si faccia aliena, e non è cosa aliena che non si faccia nostra' (Bruno 2002, 556).

is merely another change of state. Everything exists within a vicissitudinal state of time, humans included: 'And so everything of its kind has vicissitude ... from this state which we call life to that state which we call death' (Montaigne 1991, 556).<sup>24</sup> Examples from the *Eroici furori* illustrate this idea with specific references to time. In particular, the idea of 'la ruota del tempo' ('the wheel of time'; Bruno 2002, 661) is introduced as another, more poetic image of vicissitudinal time.<sup>25</sup> One of the symbols that the two interlocutors analyse is that of a wheel 'that moves continually around its centre', and which appears alongside the motto *Manens Moveor*. Maricondo explains that this emphasises the circularity of time, 'che si muove in circolo' (661):

so that motion and rest concur, for the spherical motion of a body upon its own axis and its own center implies the rest and immobility associated with rectilinear motion; or, one may say, there is a certain repose of the whole and a motion of its parts; and the parts which are moved in a circle have two kinds of alternate movement, in as much as some parts ascend to the summit, while others in turn descend to the bottom; some parts remain in an intermediate position, and some remain in the extreme position either at the top or bottom. (Bruno 1964, 195)<sup>26</sup>

Note the sense of balance and completeness that pervades this image of 'la ruota del tempo' – as one part of the wheel reaches 'la sommità' it must be replaced by another part descending towards 'il basso'. Eventually, Bruno uses this characteristic of vicissitude to demonstrate how a certain degree of predictability can be assigned to the future. However, here it is enough to understand that, as in the extracts from the *Cena de le ceneri*, Bruno understands time through continual movement; the natural order of things comprises a continual motion of states that endure and replace one another. Furthermore, as with Montaigne, Bruno emphasises how this conception of *temps-en-soi* is a natural phenomenon, a process outside of human control which seemingly affects everything and everyone. Cesarino states that 'everything' on Earth undergoes constant change, because of the vicissitude

<sup>24</sup> 'Cossì tutte nel suo geno hanno tutte vicissitudine di dominio e servitù ... de quel stato che si chiama vita e quello che si chiama morte' (Bruno 2002, 556).

<sup>25</sup> Previous critics have interpreted the 'ruota del tempo' as a symbol of fortune, but this theory does not explain why Bruno links vicissitude directly to its image. For more on this debate see Ordine 2002, 849.

<sup>26</sup> 'dove il moto concorre con la quiete, atteso che nel moto orbicolare sopra il proprio asse e circa il proprio mezzo si comprende la quiete e fermezza secondo il moto retto: over quiete del tutto, e moto secondo le parti; e da le parti che si muovono in circolo si apprendono due differenze di lazione, in quanto che successivamente altre parti montano alla sommità, altre dalla sommità descendono al basso; altre ottengono le differenze medianti, altre tengono l'estremo dell'alto e del fondo' (Bruno 2002, 661).

of all things;<sup>27</sup> emotions, movements, materials – everything is guaranteed to move from one contrary to the other, ‘this constitutes the natural order’.<sup>28</sup> Once again, if one ignores the ability to ‘think’ time, it appears that for Bruno time would simply constitute a series of changing states. The body cannot travel back or forth in time, rather it is subject to a series of continually changing conditions, of which death happens to be one part.

And yet it is patently obvious that ‘time’ carries much more significance for human beings than simply an empty, natural process from birth to death. Time is not devoid of any real meaning. The ability of humans to ‘think’ time signifies that the exact opposite is true. Bruno already states his awareness of this complexity at the beginning of the second part of the *Eroici furori*; after introducing a description of vicissitude in its most basic form, Bruno clearly states that humans cannot stop at contemplating time in this manner. Maricondo observes that, despite the truth and certainty of this process, ‘However, as for ourselves, whatever may be our circumstances, the present afflicts us more than the past does, and both present and past together please us less than the future can’ (Bruno 1964, 180).<sup>29</sup> Humans are not content with accepting the so-called natural order of things, and this is where Conche’s notion of *temporalité* comes in. Human beings are able to remember the past, for example, and feel remorse as a result of this. The mind resides within the body, but is not held captive by objective, external time. Instead it naturally seeks to interpret this process. Rather than being tied completely to the present moment, the mind is able to think about the future, to recall the past, to fear and hope, to philosophise. The next section of this article will further illustrate how both thinkers reveal their shared understanding of this fundamental difference between body and mind.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. *Temporalité: The Mind in (and out of) Time*

The tension between a body which is ultimately destined to die, and a cognitive faculty which acknowledges this but can conceptualise other strands of time, forms the basis of what Marcel Conche has labelled *temporalité*. For human beings, the future is ‘the horizon of a destiny which is death itself’ (2012,

<sup>27</sup> ‘per forza della vicissitudine delle cose’ (Bruno 2002, 646).

<sup>28</sup> ‘questo comporta l’ordine naturale’ (Bruno 2002, 646).

<sup>29</sup> ‘al nostro riguardo sempre, in qualsivoglia stato ordinario, il presente più ne afflige che il passato, et ambi doi insieme manco possono appagarne che il futuro’ (Bruno 2002, 644).

<sup>30</sup> In the words of Marcel Conche, ‘Yet, man is not only within time. The opposite is also true. Time is within man. Because I think time. Thus we have *temporalité*, which is the negation of time. Past, present, and future don’t exist together: each is separate from the other. Yet, with *temporalité*, they emerge and are thought of together: beyond my past, in accordance with my present, I project my future’ (2009, 16).

17).<sup>31</sup> Yet there is something inside human beings, as Montaigne concludes in 'Que le goust des biens et des maux', which allows them to focus on more than just death. Consequently, Montaigne identifies the soul as the part of our being that is able to exist outside the *train* and *pli* of the human body.<sup>32</sup> 'The soul can be diversified into all manner of forms; she reduces all bodily sensations and all physical accidents to herself and to whatever her own state may be. That is why we must study her, inquire into her and arouse in her almighty principles' (Montaigne 1991, 60).<sup>33</sup> Bruno's understanding of human potential is extremely similar. In the *Eroici furori* he too highlights the ability of the soul to transcend bodily concerns, and how this phenomenon is triggered by the virtue of contemplation:

the sense of inferior things is attenuated and even nullified when the superior powers are valiantly intent upon the more glorious and heroic object. So great is the virtue of contemplation (as Iamblicus notes) that sometime the soul not only turns itself from inferior acts, but also escapes the body completely. (Bruno, 1964, 197-198)<sup>34</sup>

Humans possess a powerful entity, the soul, that both Montaigne and Bruno feel individuals should utilise more carefully, focusing attention on cultivating its 'potenze superiori' or 'ressors tout-puissants'. Of course, taken on its own, this was a relatively common assumption for Renaissance thinkers to make. But Montaigne and Bruno recognise that it has vital consequences for human existence in time. Since human beings possess such potentiality

<sup>31</sup> For an introduction to phenomenological approaches to time similar to Conche's, see Tymieniecka 2007, xiv: 'Briefly, the human being realises that he or she is essentially a temporal being in se and just as much a being sustained upon other coincidental temporal beings, and upon the temporal conditions around him or her'.

<sup>32</sup> It appears that Montaigne and Bruno consider the mind to be a part of the soul. The mind possesses faculties such as intuition and imagination which contribute to the overall 'power' of the soul. The soul is mentioned most frequently as the root of human power, but the mind forms an integrated part of this power, and is often referred to directly as 'l'esprit' or 'la mente' in examples where 'l'anima' or 'l'ame' may also have been appropriate. This article refers to both terms since they both express how Montaigne and Bruno 'think' time. Incidentally Conche does not make a distinction between soul and mind. For example, he states that Aristotle often discusses the 'soul' but then rewords his example, instead referring to 'l'esprit humain'. See Conche 2009, 12.

<sup>33</sup> 'Elle [l'ame] est variable en toute sorte de formes, et renga à soy, et à son estat, quel qu'il soit, les sentiments du corps, et tous autres accidents. Pourtant le faut-il estudier et enquerir, et esveiller en elle ses ressors tout-puissants' (Montaigne 2007, 266).

<sup>34</sup> 'il senso di cose basse è attenuato et annullato dove le potenze superiori sono gagliardamente intente ad oggetto più magnifico et eroico. È tanta la virtù della contemplazione (come nota Iamblico) che accade tal volta non solo che l'anima ripose da gli atti inferiori, ma et oltre lascia il corpo a fatto' (Bruno 2002, 663). In the footnotes to this particular edition, Ordine emphasises Iamblico's interest in the conflict between the human body and philosophical contemplation (Bruno 2002, 663).

within themselves, 'We have ... given ourselves over to the vagrant liberty of our mental perceptions ...' (Montaigne 1991, 266).<sup>35</sup> The body has one trajectory, one single strand in time to follow. Human intellect, on the other hand, opens out endless possibilities. Why should one confine oneself to the experience of objective time, ignoring the potential of *temporalité* and instead letting one's actions be dictated completely by the body? This point is further emphasised by their consideration of bodily needs. Both thinkers acknowledge that the body experiences certain needs over time, such as hunger, thirst, and sexual desire. The *Eroici furori* is a text which explores the possibility of transforming passionate love into something higher, into a productive quest for divine knowledge. Thus there are many references to the senses, and bodily responses to corporal beauty. Maricondo explains to Cesarino that an individual risks becoming completely imprisoned by feelings of lust, and walking around as if the body were 'a prison which holds his liberty in chains ... a chain which holds fast his hands, shackles which have fixed his feet, and a veil which obscures his vision' (Bruno 1964, 195).<sup>36</sup> The body can imprison the soul's freedom; one who is tied solely to the bodily senses in this way, allowing their actions to be determined by what they feel in the present, is 'Servant, captive, ensnared, enchained, impotent, impenetrable and blind' (195).<sup>37</sup> An unintelligent being such as an animal is simply 'a slave to one's body' (195),<sup>38</sup> letting it act without regard for future consequences. Montaigne echoes this statement, further highlighting the gap between humans and nature that thinking time elicits. He describes how animals are completely overwhelmed by their bodily needs: 'The beasts, since they leave them [emotions] to the body while leading the mind by the nose ... as we can see from the similarity of their reactions' (1991, 60).<sup>39</sup> For humans, on the other hand, 'la pointe de nostre esprit' (Montaigne 2007, 266) infuses us with choice and the possibility to think and act outside of the whims of

<sup>35</sup> 'nous sommes emancipez de ses reigles' i.e. the rule of Nature, 'pour nous abandonner à la vagabonde liberté de noz fantasies' (Montaigne 2007, 266).

<sup>36</sup> 'carcere che tien rinchiusa la sua libertade ... catena che tien strette le sue mani, ceppe che han fissi gli suoi piedi, velo che gli tien abbagliata la vista' (Bruno 2002, 660).

<sup>37</sup> 'servo, cattivo, inveschato, incatenato, discoperato, saldo e cieco' (Bruno 1964, 195). Ironically in 'Que le goust des biens et des maux', Montaigne also explores the other side of the argument on sexual desire, questioning why some people despise the most pleasing and useful organs of all i.e. those which 'servent à nous engendrer' (Montaigne 2007, 271), 'those which serve to beget us' (Montaigne 2007, 65).

<sup>38</sup> 'Servo e schiavo del suo corpo' (Bruno 2002, 660).

<sup>39</sup> 'Les bestes ... laissent aux corps leurs sentiments, libres et naïfs' and that this is evident in the behaviour of all species, 'qu'elles montrent par la semblable application de leurs mouvements' (Montaigne 2007, 266). Of course, in typical fashion, Montaigne briefly questions whether this is actually a blessing and that if human beings were able to live solely according to the body, the torment provoked by the soul would be placated.



the body. However, such a degree of cognitive power comes with a mildly sceptical warning regarding mental wellbeing and the risk that utilising such intelligence can potentially sever one's relationship to nature:

What use is knowledge if, for its sake, we lose the calm and worse than that of Pyrrho's pig? Intelligence was given us for our greater good: shall we use it to bring about our downfall by fighting against the design of Nature and the order of the Universe, which require each creature to use its faculties and resources for its advantage? (1991, 57)<sup>40</sup>

Montaigne is keenly aware that the gift of intelligence can transport human beings far outside the natural order of existence – he understands that this can be potentially ruinous as well as enlightening. Bruno is similarly aware of this in his observations on the degree of power that human intellect can wield; the soul is 'Exposed to blessings from on high' (1964, 199),<sup>41</sup> it has potential far above and beyond that of other beings in Nature. One of the first sonnets that Maricondo and Cesarino analyse describes a typical example of the *tormento* experienced by the lover. As Maricondo points out, it is possible for an individual to transform the desire and passion for the object into divine beauty:

For I am sure that nature, having put this (corporeal) beauty before my eyes and having endowed me with an interior sense through which I can discern the most profound and incomparably superior beauty, wishes that from here below I become elevated to the height and eminence of that most excellent species. (1964, 184)<sup>42</sup>

The intellectual capabilities of 'senso interiore' are fundamental in allowing Montaigne and Bruno to escape the restricted existence of the body in time. They both understand quite clearly that there is a conflict between a body that is destined to die, a slave to its own wants and needs, and human intellect which inspires the possibility to ascribe more meaning and complexity to time. At the start of the 'Isle de Cea' Montaigne claims that in the *Essais* all he has done has been to indulge idle thoughts, to 'niaiser et fantastiquer': 'If, as they say, to philosophise is to doubt, then, *a fortiori*, to fool about and to weave

<sup>40</sup> 'A quoy faire la cognoissance des choses, si nous en devenons plus lasches? si nous en perdons le repos et la tranquillité, où nous serions sans cela? et si elle nous rend de pire condition que le pourceau de Pyrrho? L'intelligence qui nous a esté donnée pour nostre plus grand bien, l'employerons nous à nostre ruine; combatans le dessein de nature, et l'universel ordre des choses, qui porte que chacun use de ses utils et moyens pour sa commodité?' (2007, 263).

<sup>41</sup> 'esposta alla recepcion de doni superiori' (2002, 665).

<sup>42</sup> 'perché son certo che la natura che mi ha messa questa bellezza avanti gli occhi, e mi ha dotato di senso interiore, per cui posso argumentar bellezza più profonda et incomparabilmente maggiore, voglia ch'io da qua basso vegna promosso a l'altezza et eminenza di specie più eccellenti' (2002, 647-648; italics mine).

fantasies as I do must also be to doubt' (Montaigne 1991, 392).<sup>43</sup> With these words he immediately summons the role of the imagination in his writing, and underlines his perception of the freedom that the human mind possesses in order to experiment beyond the laws of Nature. Although he claims to be a mere apprentice, contemplating mere 'mortal and vain disputes',<sup>44</sup> the intellectual freedom he asserts here allows him to subvert the notion of time itself, through a radical discussion of suicide. Bruno demonstrates a similar aim, but emphasises that his ultimate goal is to attain divine knowledge. He understands that bodily senses can only provide a limited knowledge of the world; the mind is capable of reaching past the surface, perhaps one day even penetrating the divine. Cesarino asks Maricondo what he can possibly mean by stating that *la mente* aspires towards something higher. Is it not possible to simply look up towards the stars instead? Maricondo responds thus:

Certainly not, but by proceeding to the depths of the mind; and in order to accomplish this, it is not at all necessary to gaze wide-eyed toward the sky, to raise one's hands, to direct one's steps toward the temple, wearying the ears of statues with the sounds we make; but it is necessary to descend more intimately within the self and to consider that God is near, that each one has Him with him and within himself more than he himself can be within himself. (Bruno 1964, 193)<sup>45</sup>

An individual can engage their mind towards reaching for higher knowledge, which cannot be seen or heard, but instead exists deep within us.<sup>46</sup> Only the greatness of a soul unconquered,<sup>47</sup> is capable of achieving this. Hélène Védrine has described the tension arising from such a divide between the freedom of the mind and the existence of the body: 'The *Eroici furori* present the drama of the human condition, limited by nature, suffering terrible contradictions, incapable of finding peace and searching desperately to dissolve oneself in the One' (1967, 47). Similarly, Ordine has stated that 'Bruno describes the incommensurate disproportion that is created between a finite being and infinite knowledge' (2002, 135).

<sup>43</sup> 'Si Philosophes c'est douter, comme ils disent, à plus forte raison niaiser et fantasier, comme je fais, doit estre doubter' (Montaigne 2007, 368).

<sup>44</sup> 'humaines et vaines contestations' (2007, 368).

<sup>45</sup> 'Non certo, ma procedendo al profondo della mente per cui non fia mistero massime aprir gli occhi al cielo, alzar alto le mani, menar i passi al tempio, intonar l'orecchie de simulacri, onde più si vegna exaudito: ma venir al più intimo di sé, considerando che Dio è vicino, con sé e dentro di sé, più ch'egli medesimo esser non si possa ...' (Bruno 2002, 658).

<sup>46</sup> In the words of Nuccio Ordine, 'Philosophy, within its greatest manifestation, realises itself in this search for the One, in this contemplation of nature, in this effort to seize the invisible in the visible, unity in multiplicity' (2002, 81).

<sup>47</sup> 'la grandezza d'un animo invitto' (2002, 659).

Clearly there is a tension that arises between the body and intellect, which severely complicates the human relationship to time. They begin to experiment with time, challenging traditional responses to it by reinventing attitudes towards the future, for example. *Temporalité* is only possible due to this intellectual freedom of the mind in (and out of) time; Montaigne and Bruno engage in this philosophical search and, in doing so, address exactly the same issues surrounding fear of death. We have seen briefly that in the sixteenth century, questions of otherness and difference, prompted by phenomena such as the exoticism of the Native Americans, were influencing Montaigne's and Bruno's thought. Time is one theme that allowed them to push intellectual boundaries further, exploiting the undermining of tradition and, in this case, creating radically new expectations of the future. Montaigne's discussion of suicide offers human beings a much larger degree of control over the natural order of time. Bruno constructs an entirely new idea of the future through imagining a state of what this article will refer to as 'heroic time'. He creates an energetic new conception of time that is only possible through the power of the mind and its potential ability to rise above mortal concerns. As with Montaigne's exploration of suicide, the importance of mortal, objective time is diminished as the heroic lover transcends human knowledge and accesses higher knowledge, resulting in a 'death' which sees the lover intermingled with the divine. Introducing a collection of essays on time, Tymieniecka states that 'the reflective human being is pressed, impelled by the questioning bent of his or her beingness to wonder, to ask, to interrogate, to seek "reasons" for the turns of life's route' (2007, xv). Montaigne and Bruno are both deeply conscious of the conflict between finite body and the infinite scope of the mind. The next and final section briefly illustrates how both philosophers attempt to interrogate and ultimately 'rethink' ideas of time.

### 5. (Re)thinking Time

Since there is not enough space here to illustrate all of the ways that Montaigne and Bruno 'rethink' time, infusing it with new meanings and significance, this section will focus on some of their considerations regarding the future. The human mind can condition how one reacts to certain elements of time, and many of these reactions become entrenched in wider society. For example, Conche argues that time naturally provokes an instinctive dread in human beings. This is because it is certain that the future will culminate in death; 'Because of death, human *temporalité* is consumed by angst' (2009, 17). This state of *angoisse* is only possible through the ability of the mind to contemplate the future (*temporalité*) and Montaigne and Bruno describe this phenomenon in exactly the same way. Towards the start of the dialogue in the *Eroici furori*, Maricondo explains that, despite the relatively simple process of vicissitude,

human beings tend to divide time into past, present and future – ‘[They are] words which represent the three parts of time’ (Bruno 1964, 180).<sup>48</sup> The past can torment someone through the memory of what has happened, whilst the future ‘hangs in expectation’.<sup>49</sup> Oftentimes, people are in danger of living life with their minds already absorbed in the future: ‘and he brings upon himself what has not yet befallen him, a thing certainly worse than whatever could overtake him’ (215).<sup>50</sup> Montaigne identifies death as the root source of this worry; he agrees that many people are obsessed with waiting for the future to arrive. The anxiety becomes so unbearable that it is impossible to ‘Merely patiently waiting for death to come’ (1991, 392).<sup>51</sup> Fear of losing something is also mentioned as another factor that plagues human beings with anxiety. In ‘Que le goust des biens et des maux’, Montaigne recounts a period in his life when he inherited a lot of money. Instead of feeling happy about this inheritance, he explains how he was tormented by the future, scared of losing his fortune at any moment. As Bruno says, he was turning the future into the present, allowing his actions to be dictated by anxiety over something that may not even happen. Similarly, Cesarino, in *Eroici furori*, uses a metaphor to describe the jealousy that a lover may feel over their loved one, and he compares this to one who has just gained something: ‘For example, it behooves one who has sought a kingdom and now possesses it to feel the fear of losing it; it behooves one who has labored to acquire the fruits of love and to know the special favor of the beloved to feel the bite of jealousy and suspicion’ (Bruno 1964, 181).<sup>52</sup> For many human beings, their anxiety is rooted in trying to guess what the future may hold, and more often than not they ascribe an overwhelmingly negative meaning to the future. The mind becomes clouded by *angoisse*. In response, Montaigne and Bruno attempt to infuse the future with new and more positive meaning.

As we have seen, intellect resides within human beings. Montaigne and Bruno believe it is capable of envisioning more positive images of the future, rather than solely negative ones. After all, as both thinkers remind their readers, the power to change this conception of the future ‘se loge[r] en nous’, it is inside us, ‘dentro di sé’; ‘And if we did have such a choice and were free from constraint we would be curiously mad to pull in the direction

<sup>48</sup> ‘son dizzioni che significano le tre parti del tempo’ (Bruno 2002, 644).

<sup>49</sup> ‘sempre in aspettazione e speranza’ (644).

<sup>50</sup> ‘si fa presente quel che non gli è sopragionto ancora, et è certo peggiore che sopragiongere gli possa ...’ (681).

<sup>51</sup> ‘attendre patiemment la mort, quand elle nous vient’ (Montaigne 2007, 368).

<sup>52</sup> ‘atteso che ad un ch’ha cercato un regno et ora il possiede, conviene il timor di perderlo; ad un ch’ha lavorato per acquistar gli frutti de l’amore, come è la particular grazia de la cosa amata, conviene il morso della gelosia e suspizione’ (Bruno 2002, 645).

which hurts us most' (Montaigne 1991, 52).<sup>53</sup> Thus they set about to asking questions of this traditional way of thinking about the future. Bruno cites Seneca in order to emphasise that often the fear of something bad occurring is worse than the 'bad thing' itself: 'he sees the effect of the fear of evil, which is worse than the evil itself' (Bruno 1964, 215).<sup>54</sup> 'Que le goust des biens et des maux' expresses this very same idea in the title; Montaigne begins the chapter by asking whether humans fear things themselves or the opinion they have of things. In the 'Isle de Cea', Montaigne also quotes Seneca, who advises that in life there are several things worse than death – pain, for example, or rape. After a brief exploration of Stoic doctrine, Montaigne concurs with Bruno, stating that fear is often worse than the thing feared itself: 'I find from experience that it is our inability to suffer the thought of dying which makes us unable to suffer the pain of it, and that the pain we do suffer is twice as grievous since it threatens us with death' (1991, 58).<sup>55</sup> In light of this reasoning, death (and subsequently the future in general) begins to be considered in a more positive light: 'Yet everyone knows that death, called the dreadest of all dreadful things, is by others called the only haven from life's torments, our natural sovereign good' (53).<sup>56</sup> Even rethinking the process of vicissitude itself can change the way humans perceive the future; as Bruno remarks, surely vicissitudinal time makes the future much more predictable? If society is in a state of moral decline, as he perceives that it is, at least it is certain that this will change – 'We can certainly expect the return to better conditions' (1964, 180).<sup>57</sup> From out of the darkness of this moral decadence, 'We can safely prophecy light and prosperity; if we live in an era of felicity and enlightenment, without doubt we can expect a succession of affliction and ignorance' (182).<sup>58</sup> Common fears over death and loss, which are rooted in

<sup>53</sup> 'il est en nous de la changer: et en ayant le choix, si nul ne nous force, nous sommes estrangement fols de nous bander pour le party qui nous est le plus ennuyeux' (Montaigne 2007, 258).

<sup>54</sup> 'vede gli effetti del timor del male, il quale è peggio ch'il male istesso' (Bruno 2002, 681). Seneca is a shared source between the two thinkers. Direct quotations frequently appear in the *Essais*, whilst Senecan tragedy is cited by Bruno several times in the 'Italian Dialogues'. For other uses of Seneca in the 'Dialogues' see Granada 1997.

<sup>55</sup> 'Et je trouve par experience, que c'est plustost l'impatience de l'imagination de la mort, qui nous rend impatiens de la douleur: et que nous la sentons doublement grieve, de ce qu'elle nous menace de mourir' (Montaigne 2007, 264).

<sup>56</sup> 'Or cette mort que les uns appellent des choses horribles la plus horrible, qui ne sçait que d'autres la nomment l'unique port des tourmens de ceste vie?' (259).

<sup>57</sup> 'possiamo certo aspettare de ritornare a miglior stati' (Bruno 2002, 643).

<sup>58</sup> 'possiamo sicuramente profetizzar la luce e prosperitate; quando siamo nella felicità e disciplina, senza dubio possiamo aspettar il successo de l'ignoranze e travagli' (645). Montaigne employs similar language when exploring pain in 'Que le goust des biens et des maux': 'D'avantage cela doit nous consoler, que naturellement, si la douleur est violente, elle est courte: si elle est longue, elle est legere, si *gravis*, *brevis*: si *longus*, *levis*. Tu ne la sentiras guere long temps, si tu la sens trop; elle

ideas of what the future might hold, have here been reversed and rethought. With the power of the soul it is possible to try and rise above such emotions:

This book presents all the varieties of contraction, by which some ignominiously and others heroically arrive at the point of no longer feeling the fear of death, or suffering the pain of the body, or feeling the impediments of pleasure; for hope, joy and the delights of the higher spirit gather such force, that they abolish all the passions which can engender doubt, pain and sadness. (198)<sup>59</sup>

The ability to change the future into something more positive resides within each human being. Even if death itself cannot be prevented, fear of death can certainly be allayed. Although the body in time is still tied to its fate, Montaigne and Bruno demonstrate identical patterns of thought that can drastically change one's understanding of time, learning to control the fear that it may provoke. The common sense of *angoisse* over the future has been dramatically reduced due to the ability of the mind to philosophise over time. Previous critics seeking to compare the two thinkers have identified how they often reach entirely different solutions when faced with a shared problem. Indeed, as well as using philosophy in a similar manner in order to allay fear of death, they also further extend their examination of the future in separate ways, constructing extremely different conceptions of time that again seek to portray the future as positive. Both Montaigne's examination of suicide, and Bruno's construction of 'heroic time', are further examples of how they attribute a more positive characteristic to the future through their emphasis on human action. They both achieve this by diminishing the importance of objective time and their supposedly finite existence within it.

Montaigne undertakes a detailed exploration of how human emotion clouds one's response to time. Depression and self-loathing, common causes of suicide in human beings, are unique to the human mind, separating humans from their animal counterparts: 'it is unnatural that we should despise ourselves or care little for ourselves; it is a sickness peculiar to Man to hate and despise himself; it is found in no other animate creature' (1991, 397).<sup>60</sup> Such emotions feed off our unique ability to bring back the past and

mettra fin à soy, ou à toy; l'un et l'autre revient à un' (2007, 265) (In addition, it ought to console us that, by Nature, 'if pain is violent it is short; if long, light' ... You will not feel it for long if you feel it grievously: either it will quench itself or quench you, which amounts to the same thing' [1991, 60]).

<sup>59</sup> 'De quali alcune vituperosa, altre eroicamente fanno che non s'apprenda téma di morte, non si soffrisca dolor di corpo, non si sentano impedimenti di piaceri: onde la speranza, la gioia, e gli dilette del spirito superiore siano di tal sorte intenti, che faccian spente le passioni tutte che possano aver origine de dubbio, dolore e tristezza alcuna' (Bruno 2002, 663).

<sup>60</sup> 'c'est contre nature, que nous nous mesprisons et mettons nous mesmes à nonchaloir; c'est une maladie particuliere, et qui ne se voit en aucune autre creature, de se hayr et desdaigner' (Montaigne 2007, 372).

incessantly think over events that have already happened. Throughout the *Essais*, Montaigne does not hide his interest in extreme forms of human behaviour, and suicide is no different. In fact, suicide completely destroys the preeminence of the natural order of time. It does more than simply rethink time – it actively hands over direct control of death to the individual, rather than ‘waiting’ for death to occur. The body is destroying itself by its own hand. We have already examined the graphic images of the body dying due to disease, accident or the violence of others; in both the ‘Isle de Cea’ and ‘Que le goust des biens et des maux’, Montaigne also lists countless examples of people actively dying by their own hand. A young woman throws herself in the river with her mother and sisters; villagers who are about to be captured fling themselves into a fire; in the Bible, Nicanor chooses to die rather than fall into the hands of enemies, and stabs himself, bangs his head against a rock and finally pulls out his own entrails. These shocking examples actually reveal a deeply heightened sense of control over time. Suicide allows the young woman to escape from being gang-raped by soldiers, whilst the villagers who burn in the fire have escaped enslavement, just like Nicanor. It appears that humans are capable of destroying the natural order of time, and why not? Montaigne makes a convincing argument in favour of the idea that sometimes human life is bleak – suicide is an individual choice that can end a miserable existence. His philosophy, which he labels the ability to ‘niaiser et fantastiquer’, has in fact led him to reject even the simple timeline that the body exists within. It is within ourselves to choose death, for, in the final analysis, it is a matter which concerns our being, our everything.<sup>61</sup> Humans possess the power to change the natural order of time itself. Rather than waiting for death, it is within our control to choose it if we wish. Even though suicide is largely considered to be a taboo, it is extremely positive in the sense that it hands over a large degree of control to human beings.

At first glance, Bruno’s idea of ‘heroic time’, i.e. the lover transforming their passion into a philosophical pursuit that will lead to divinity, appears to be completely removed from Montaigne’s discussion of suicide. And yet both thinkers are analysing an extreme example of human behaviour, and rejecting the natural order of time, dwelling on the positive implications of the destruction of the body. The notion of a ‘heroic time’ is central to understanding the *Eroici furori*. It is an interpretation of time that looks to the future as something that holds great promise; the lover has the potential to transform their passion into a productive pursuit of knowledge, eventually connecting with divine matter. Bruno believes that mortal love can be transformed into contemplation of the divine, aiming one day to uncover the divine itself. Maricondo explains the fundamental aims of the lover to Cesarino. Heroic time is dominated by a continual pursuit of philosophy, which will eventually lead to contemplation

<sup>61</sup> ‘Car en fin c’est nostre estre, c’est nostre tout’ (Montaigne 2007, 372).

of the divine. All one's energy must be spent on studying, on philosophising, and then the future will promise something better:

These are the reasons why one must first of all leave the multitude and withdraw within himself. Then he must reach the state in which he no longer regards but scorns each struggle, so that the more passion and vice fight him from within and vicious enemies from without the more will he recover his breath and rise again, and with one exhalation (if possible) surmount the steep ascent. (Bruno 1964, 194)<sup>62</sup>

Death no longer becomes the sole destiny of an individual. According to heroic time, death is irrelevant since one will eventually be able to merge with divinity itself – the body will be left behind, '*lascie il corpo*'. In the midst of the incomprehensible excellence of the divine, the body and mind dissolve into it. Echoing the myth of Atteone, hunted by his own dogs after seeing the goddess Diana, 'the hunter becomes the hunted'.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, as the name suggests, the idea of heroic time does not include everyone. One must actively elevate oneself out of mere mortal concerns: 'Because the mind aspires to the divine splendor it flees association with the crowd and withdraws itself from the multitudes' (1964, 192).<sup>64</sup> Heroic time again destroys the preeminence of *temps-en-soi*. The body becomes irrelevant, the ultimate goal of attaining divine knowledge erases the concept of vicissitude – the body vanishes and loses itself – dissolving into non-time, mixed with the divine, the One.<sup>65</sup> This is the passage of time that one who devotes oneself utterly and completely to philosophy may follow – uncovering the secrets of nature or '*segreti della natura*' is the only worthwhile way to pass the time. Once again this idea proves that humans have the potential to destroy the natural order of time, and dismiss its relevance. Like Montaigne, Bruno emphasises each individual's power of reflection. The power to rethink time resides within human beings.

## 6. Conclusion

Montaigne and Bruno understand that humans possess a deeply complicated relationship to time. The body in time exists within a relatively straightforward

<sup>62</sup> 'Ecco dunque come bisogna fare primeramente de ritirarsi dalla moltitudine in se stesso. Appresso deve dovenir a tale che non stime ma spreggia ogni fatica, di sorte che quanto più gli affetti e vizii combattono da dentro, e gli viziosi nemici constatano di fuori, tanto per deve respirar e risorgere, e con uno spirito (se possibil fia) superar questo clivoso monte' (Bruno 2002, 659).

<sup>63</sup> 'Il gran cacciator divenne caccia' (658).

<sup>64</sup> 'Perché la mente aspira al splendor divino, fuggie il consorzio de la turba, si ritira dalla commune opinione'; 'La mente dunque ch'aspira alto, per la prima lascia la cura della moltitudine ...' (657).

<sup>65</sup> 'Svanisce, e perder l'esser suo' (682).



trajectory, tied utterly and completely to the present moment, with the spectre of death somewhere in the distance. The mind is a part of the body, and yet it is not. The mind allows Montaigne and Bruno to think time, and to rethink it. Consequently human beings are handed more choice and more control over their own temporal existence. Of course, humans cannot alter the flow of time itself. However, Montaigne and Bruno present their readers with strands of thought that can ease the sense of fear which arises from this fact. Rethinking the rationale behind fear of death, analysing the choices available through suicide and the potential that philosophical study can ignite are all ways in which human beings can transform a passive existence within time into something that offers more control over the future. This interaction with time potentially carves out a more unique place for human beings within the cosmos. Exploring the tension between body and mind in time clearly begins to identify several points of connection between Montaigne and Bruno, uncovering links between the two that have previously been ignored. It is hoped that further study of these connections will highlight in more detail the relationship that emerges between time and truth, and what the epistemological implications are for this desire to push the boundaries of human intellect. Future research may also decide to analyse the third aspect of Conche's definition of time, *temporalisation*, which signifies how one chooses to use one's time based on *temporalité*. In short, there are still many avenues of research to be pursued which can contribute towards further establishing a rich and meaningful field of study that embraces both the differences between Montaigne and Bruno's philosophy, as well as the fascinating points of convergence.

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